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ABSTRACT

Six student and four potential student populations were sampled to determine what, how, when, and where suburban community college students and potential students would like to learn, and to relate learning preferences to sex, age, education, occupation, and the 10 groups surveyed. A total of 952 community college student responses were obtained, and 2,640 responses were given by potential students. For comparison with respondents, a telephone survey of a random sample of nonresponding residents was conducted. Data were analyzed separately for each sample group and collectively for all respondents. Results of the study included the following: (1) potential students preferred these learning goals: developing or improving job skills, transferring to a senior college, personal enjoyment or satisfaction, and improving self-understanding; (2) about three-fourths of the students and potential students were interested in learning by attending scheduled classes; two-thirds of the respondents also expressed interest in nontraditional approaches to learning; and a majority of both student groups were willing to meet general education requirements by a "courseless" approach; (3) both groups of students preferred to learn at their own convenience; and (4) three-fourths of the respondents preferred to learn on the college campus, but almost half expressed interest in learning at home or in local public-school buildings. General institutional recommendations are made. (DB)

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RESEARCH BRIEF

Office of Institutional Research
MORAINE VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
10900 S. 88th Avenue
Palos Hills, Illinois 60465

ED 095961

Date: May, 1974

Learning Preferences of Community College Students and Potential Students

I. Objectives

On the basis of a planning conference designed to explore the feasibility of combining the separate but related data needs of four organizational units*, the following general objectives for this study were established:

- To determine what, how, when and where suburban community college students and potential students would like to learn.
- To relate learning preferences to sex, age, education, occupation and to student or potential student group.

II. Procedures

In the planning conference, organizational units identified the student and potential student populations from which they desired information. Student populations sampled and the responses from each were:

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* Organizational units and their concerns included:

Subdivision A
Student and potential student interest in a "courseless approach" to general education requirements;

Subdivision C
Feasibility of establishing a weekend college program;

Dean of Student and Community Services
and Office of Continuing Education
Community preferences for types of community education and public service activities and instructional locations.

JC 740 333

Number of Responses	Student Population
452	Fall '73 MVCC credit students who re-enrolled in Spring '74
141	Fall '73 MVCC credit students who didn't re-enroll in Spring '74
67	Current or former C.L.E.P. students
74	Students enrolled in U.S. history via local newspaper
81	Saturday credit classes
138	Saturday Community Education classes
952	Total Community College Student Responses

Random samples were drawn from the first three populations, which were the largest, and the entire populations of the smaller groups were surveyed. Almost no overlapping existed among these student populations.

In addition to these student groups, potential student populations sampled and the responses from each were:

Number of Responses	Potential Students
952	MVCC student groups
984	Local public high school seniors
641	Adult residents of the district
63	Non-degree holding MVCC staff
2,640	Total Potential Student Responses

The distribution of high school senior responses by high school was proportional to the distribution of all high school seniors by high school. Similarly, the distribution of adult resident responses by municipality was proportional to the population of district households by municipality. According to a conservative reliability estimate, chances are more than 99 per cent that percentages based upon a random sample the size of our sample are within 5 per cent of those which would be obtained if every district household were studied. (A summary of sample characteristics including sex, age and educational level is presented in Appendix A*.)

Two basic questionnaire forms were developed to gather the data for this study. The form which focused on community education and public service activities was administered by instructors in Continuing Education classes and was mailed to a random sample of households in each district municipality. The other form was administered by instructors in regular credit Saturday classes and was mailed to all other samples except high school seniors. A variation of the second form was administered to public high school seniors by local high school teachers or counselors. (Sample questionnaires, cover letters, project calendar and cost analysis appear in Appendix B**.)

For comparison with respondents, a telephone survey of a random sample of non-responding residents was conducted.

Data were analyzed separately for each sample group and collectively for all respondents.

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*Appendix A. Data Tables to Accompany Learning Preferences of Community College Students and Potential Students, MVCC Office of Institutional Research.

**Appendix B. Sample Questionnaires, Cover Letters, Project Calendar and Cost Analysis to Accompany Learning Preferences of Community College Students and Potential Students, MVCC Office of Institutional Research.

III. General Results

WHAT?

- Although some student and potential student groups favored some learning goals more than others, potential students expressed almost equal preference for these learning goals:
  - Developing initial or improving existing job skills
  - Transferring to a senior college
  - Personal enjoyment or satisfaction
  - Improving self-understanding
- Although adult residents expressed most interest in activities oriented toward personal enjoyment they also expressed interest in improving business communication and human relations skills.

HOW?

- About three-fourths of the students and potential students expressed interest in learning by attending scheduled classes.
- Seven of ten respondents also expressed interest in earning credit for non-school learning.
- Two-thirds of the respondents also expressed interest in non-traditional approaches to learning including earning credit by examination, studying at their own speed, through independent study with conferences or through study contracts.
- About four of ten respondents also expressed interest in home-study approaches to learning including TV, newspaper or correspondence.
- A majority of students and potential students expressed willingness to meet general education requirements by "courseless" approach. However, about one-fourth were not able to decide on the basis of information included in the questionnaire.

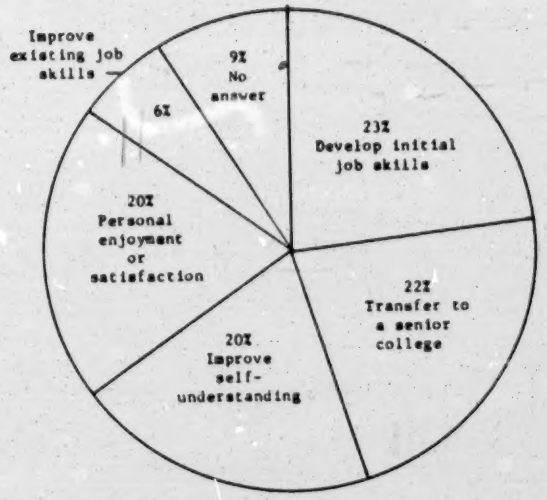
WHEN?

- Students and potential students prefer to learn at their own convenience rather than follow a college-prescribed schedule. Evenings were the most preferred college-scheduled learning time. Adult students and community residents reported that conflicts between work or family responsibilities and course schedules were a major obstacle to continuing their learning.
- Although less than one-tenth of the students and potential students definitely rejected the idea, less than one-fourth expressed willingness to enroll for a weekend schedule.

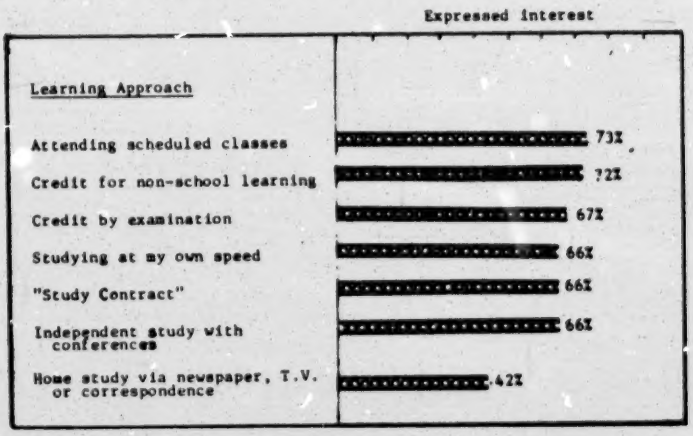
WHERE?

- Although three-fourths of the respondents prefer to learn on the college campus, almost half expressed interest in learning at home or in local public school buildings also. In addition about four of ten expressed interest also in learning in local public libraries and an almost equal number expressed interest in learning in local businesses and industries.

WHAT ?



HOW ?


Expressed interest
Learning Approach
Attending scheduled classes 73%
Credit for non-school learning 72%
Credit by examination 67%
Studying at my own speed 66%
"Study Contract" 66%
Independent study with conferences 66%
Home study via newspaper, T.V. or correspondence 42%

WHEN ?

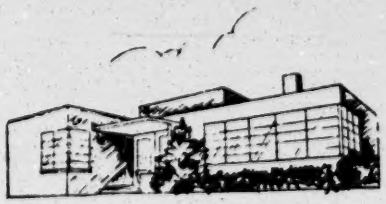
WHEN WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN?

WHERE ?

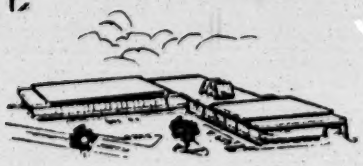
At local public schools (48%)

At home (48%)

At Moraine Valley Community College (74%)



At local public libraries (42%)



At local businesses and industries (37%)

IV. General Institutional Recommendations

WHAT?

- Because students and potential students endorsed the general goals of our comprehensive community college, the college should continue to pursue and refine these goals, perhaps in some ways suggested by this study.
- Because the college already offers a variety of personal-enjoyment oriented activities which should satisfy adult needs, workshops or seminars on business communication skills and on human relations skills should be developed and offered.

HOW?

- The strong support for non-traditional learning approaches expressed by students and potential students supports college objectives and should encourage college staff to continue to develop, offer, evaluate and revise non-traditional methods of instruction.
- College administrators should consider providing staff development activities to assist staff with instructional materials development and effective use of non-traditional instructional delivery systems. Training or experience in either of these areas should be favored in selection of new staff members.

WHEN?

- Because all student and potential student groups, other than high school seniors, reported work conflicts with course schedules as a primary obstacle to their learning and because students and potential students favored student-scheduled rather than college-scheduled learning activities, the college should:
  - Identify current offerings which are typically available during only days or evenings and devise and publicize a master schedule plan which rotates these offerings across the entire instruction schedule.
  - Use some of the non-traditional methods named in these results to expand opportunities for students to schedule learning activities according to demands of their personal schedules. Learning research and MVCC experience indicates, however, that most students require some form of time scheduling for successful learning.
  - Weekend college offerings should be expanded gradually to serve the needs of interested students. Publicity should be provided to inform potential students of these offerings.
  - In order of respondents' preferences, weekend offerings should be added on Saturday, Sunday afternoon and Friday evening.

WHERE?

- The extent of student and potential student interest in off-campus learning sites, especially the home, suggests that college staff should continue to develop, offer, evaluate and revise learning opportunities which are "portable" and largely self-instructional.

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OCT 11 1974

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